

Trust the Process:

GSA Leveraging Cloud Technology to Deliver Government Value

To help others, one must first help themselves. The General Services Administration's (GSA's) implementation of cloud computing across the organization embodies this concept. [GSA's core mission](#) revolves around the effective delivery of quality products and services to the wider federal government. This is a tall task, as their strategic goals writ large include saving taxpayer money and being an acquisition leader in thought and practice. In turning their eyes to cloud technology, GSA has acquired mission-enabling tools that showcase how these goals are being achieved.

GSA's Cloud Journey: A Decade in the Making

GSA began their vanguard cloud journey in 2011. They were the first federal agency to migrate to a cloud-based email and collaboration suite. They then leveraged cloud in the following years to migrate their entire Customer Relationship Management (CRM) capability and separately, consolidate disparate IT help desks. (Each migration reduced operational costs and improved customer experience significantly.) While these efforts are of notable success, GSA ultimately set themselves up for cloud success and optimization with their thorough Application Rationalization (AppRat) Process.

In one of his first major initiatives as GSA CIO, David Shive knew the agency had to review GSA's digital environment by performing comprehensive [Application Rationalization](#). GSA IT took inventory of applications, assessed each one's IT and business value via an organizational survey, and then categorized them using the TIME (Tolerate, Invest, Migrate, or Eliminate) model. Each application was assessed on their technical redundancy, technical utilization and user rates, cost of development and cost of operations and maintenance. It resulted in:

- The elimination of applications.
- Cost avoidance for FY15-17.
- Significant return on investment (ROI).
- A strategy/roadmap for every application.

GSA's Cloud and IT Modernization efforts have resulted in increased data centralization, improved resource allocation, increased end user satisfaction, and enhanced IT security. It is a necessary first step if agencies want to be Cloud Smart. GSA has maintained an "A" on their FITARA Scorecard in the [Data Center Optimization Initiative](#) (DCOI) category, having closed all 121 of its data centers. (The agency utilizes best-in-class shared service providers to handle what were once on-premises workloads.) As the number of data centers operating federal wide [hovers around 12,100](#), GSA's offloading of on-premises workloads is an outlier. It is the result of organizational buy-in, good planning and great execution.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

If there's one understated element of a cloud journey that needs more attention, it is the workforce involved. It's essential to have the right governance in place and subject matter experts to make a successful move to the cloud. Subject matter experts will be able to explain to leadership how a cloud solution will solve a pertinent problem, improve customer value, and lead to a positive business outcome.

And if you don't have the right human capital on your team? Invest in your people! Train your team on new skill sets directly or hire experts outside the organization so they can share their knowledge. Augment existing Infrastructure Operations staff with cloud engineers. Make learning Agile, DevSecOps and other digital infrastructure technologies a priority with your internal team, as they will accelerate ongoing technology modernization efforts.

When you have rationalized your application environment, hired the right people, and instituted your cloud governance, make sure that your current infrastructure and IT landscape are cloud ready. Determine what types of data the organization has and if it requires additional security protections such as Cyber Defense in Depth (DiD) and Zero Trust Networks (ZTN). At every point, make sure that you can tie a positive business outcome to your cloud acquisition (e.g. increased cybersecurity, increased velocity of delivery, decreased complexity, increased agility). Government leaders who control the purse strings must justify their IT investments by being able to demonstrate these value added capabilities.

Cloud, Business, and Mission: 3 Sides of the Same Coin

It is becoming clear that business objectives, workforce and cloud computing are now intertwined and codependent. While GSA's cloud footprint is formidable, the agency has purposefully managed cloud adoption by following and trusting a specific process. GSA has leaned out its digital ecosystem, put the right people with the right training in place and are achieving their strategic goals. The [GSA IT Strategic Plan](#) emphasizes that "As an innovative IT organization, GSA cannot be afraid to take risks and break the glass ceiling of the federal government. We have a responsibility to innovate on behalf of the federal government, inspiring and driving technology transformation so all federal agencies can successfully accomplish their missions."